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ABSTRACT

The Sixth Annual Children and the Media Conference, hosted by Children Now, focused on the media's role and potential influence on boys. This report highlights the thinking of participating advocates, academics, entertainment industry leaders, and children. Following excerpts from a keynote address by William Pollack of Harvard Medical School, the report summarizes themes that emerged from the panel discussions through five classic media icons: (1) "The Joker"; (2) "The Jock"; (3) "The Strong Silent Type"; (4) "The Big Shot"; and (5) "The Action Hero." In each section, selected research findings from media studies, a national survey, and focus groups are presented. The report also includes excerpts from a panel of young people who offered opinions, observations, and advice for media makers. The report concludes with reflections of representatives from the media and a series of questions about the portrayal of males in the media. (LPP)

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boystoMEN

CONFERENCE REPORT

ED 440 776

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Media Messages About Masculinity

Sixth Annual Children & the Media Conference

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Children Now is a nonpartisan, independent voice for America's children. Using innovative research and communications strategies, Children Now promotes pioneering solutions to problems facing America's children. Recognized nationally for its policy expertise, up-to-date information on the status of children, and leading work with the media, Children Now focuses particular attention on the needs of children who are poor or at risk, while working to improve conditions for all children by making them a top priority across the nation.

The **Children & the Media Program** works to improve the quality of news and entertainment media for children and about children's issues. We seek to accomplish that goal through independent research, public policy development, and outreach to leaders in the media industry.

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"I thought that at birth American men are allowed just as many tears as American women, but because we are forbidden to shed them, we die long before women do, with our hearts exploding or our blood pressure rising or our livers eaten away by alcohol, because that lake of grief inside us has no outlet. We men die because our faces were not watered enough."

■ Pat Conroy, *Beach Music*, Doubleday

December, 1999

Dear Friends,

Children Now is pleased to present this report on the Sixth Annual Children & the Media Conference. This year's topic, *Boys to Men: Media Messages About Masculinity*, continues our exploration of the media's role in identity formation among young people. Earlier conferences, which focused on media portrayals of girls (*Reflections of Girls in the Media*) and images of race & class (*A Different World*), built upon emerging work surrounding these important issues. This year's examination broke new ground.

Robert Baskin and Larry Smith

In part as a result of the horrific series of tragedies across the country, there has been important media and academic attention paid to the overall status of our nation's boys, particularly in relation to violence. However, research into the role

and potential influence of the media on boys was scant to none. The Children Now research commissioned for this conference, and fully reported in companion publications, revealed important new findings. These findings, along with the thoughtful keynote address by Harvard psychologist, Dr. William Pollack, provided the platform for a series of stimulating panel discussions.

The panels were organized around three themes. *Breaking the Boy Code* addressed media representations of men's emotions and their relationships. *Boy Meets World* considered how the media portrays masculine success and reinforces masculine ideals and values. *Must Boys be Boys?* entered the provocative arena of action, adventure, and aggression, and explored the potential for such a genre without violence. The discussions which emerged from these panels are summarized in this report through classic masculine icons— ***The Joker, The Jock, The Strong Silent Type, The Big Shot,*** and ***The Action Hero.*** Additionally, the ideas and concerns from a panel of thoughtful young people from the Los Angeles area brought important insights to the conference.

Threaded throughout this report is the clear understanding that the media is not to blame for the troubling status of boys today, but does indeed reinforce society's notions about manliness and masculinity. Many media leaders who participated recognized that subtle and unexamined links between media messages and the healthy development of boys offer a challenge and an opportunity. The media can broaden the images and messages that define masculinity. The media can offer excitement and adventure without violence. The media can expand the job description of "hero." The media can influence the life script for a generation of American boys.

Donald Kennedy
Chairman of the Board

Lois Salisbury
President, Children Now

Patti Miller
Director, Children & the Media Program

The Keynote

Excerpts from keynote address by William Pollack, Ph.D. Assistant Clinical Professor, Harvard Medical School, author of "Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood."

"I believe boys today are in serious trouble, especially many who seem normal and okay and to be doing just fine. They are confused by society's mixed messages about what's expected of them as boys and later as men and many feel a sadness and disconnection they cannot even give name to.

It starts at birth and it happens unwittingly, both by society and by parents. We start to give messages to boys early on that they should emote less, they should express less feeling, and they should solve their problems through action rather than talk. What we're doing is inculcating what I call the 'Boy Code.' It comes on very strong about the time of kindergarten, at age four or five, when they lose their emotional voice, when they are 'straitjacketed' into a narrow band of masculinity.

The Boy Code

- **Be a big boy.**
- **Be a little man.**
- **Cut mama's apron strings.**
- **Stand on your own two feet.**
- **Big boys don't cry.**

Pushing boys away from the love of their parents (and particularly the love of their mothers) so they can be 'strong men,' is not only hurtful to boys, I think it's a *trauma* to boys and hurtful to society at large. It forces boys to take that emotion, that caring, that love that we share as a species, and push it underneath to repress it at a very young age. And what happens is that boys create a 'mask.' Not a real mask, but a psychological mask, a mask of false

Myths of Boyhood

Three major myths control the way we look at boys in America, the way we portray them in the media, and the way we respond to them, even as loving parents and caretakers or educators.

Myth #1: Boys will be boys.

Where there's testosterone there's aggression, and where there's aggression there will be violence or at least its potential.

Balderdash. There is not a scintilla of scientific evidence that boys or men are more violent biologically than women are. Boys are more action oriented. They tend to be more rough and tumble in their play. Many of their feelings are expressed through action, adventure, and quest, not bad aggression or violence.

Myth #2: Boys should be boys.

They must fit a rigid gender stereotype.

I call this the "gender straitjacket." At age four or five, when boys lose their emotional voice—their connection to their inner self—they are straitjacketed into a narrow band of masculinity.

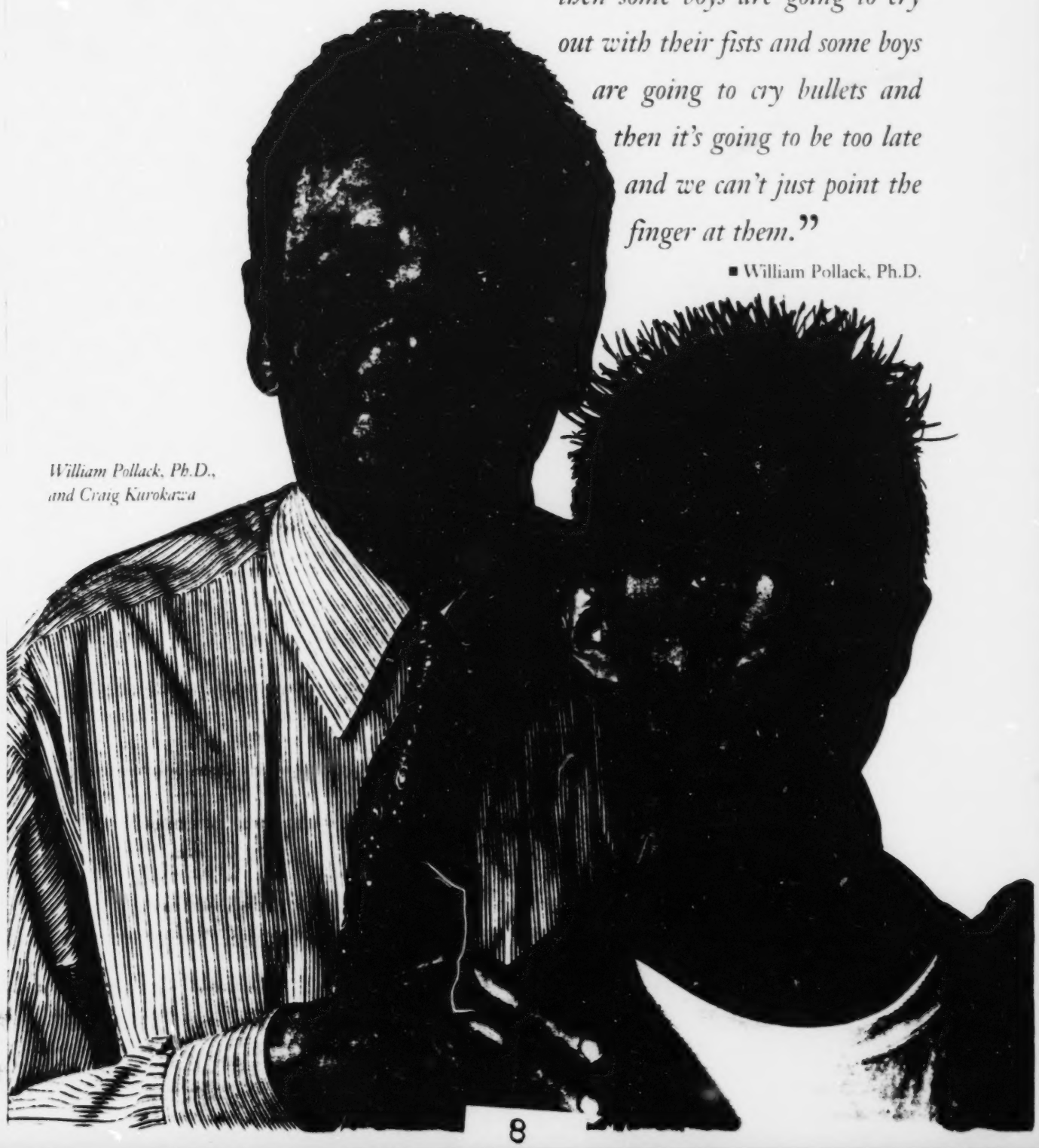
Myth #3: Boys are toxic.

They are psychologically unaware, emotionally unsocialized creatures at birth who have to be watched over every moment lest they become aggressive.

Boys are actually more emotional than girls at birth and older boys have a yearning to be empathic and caring and connected. They express it differently than girls do.

"If we don't allow our boys to cry tears, not just at five or at six, but at ten and at fifteen and twenty, then some boys are going to cry out with their fists and some boys are going to cry bullets and then it's going to be too late and we can't just point the finger at them."

■ William Pollack, Ph.D.



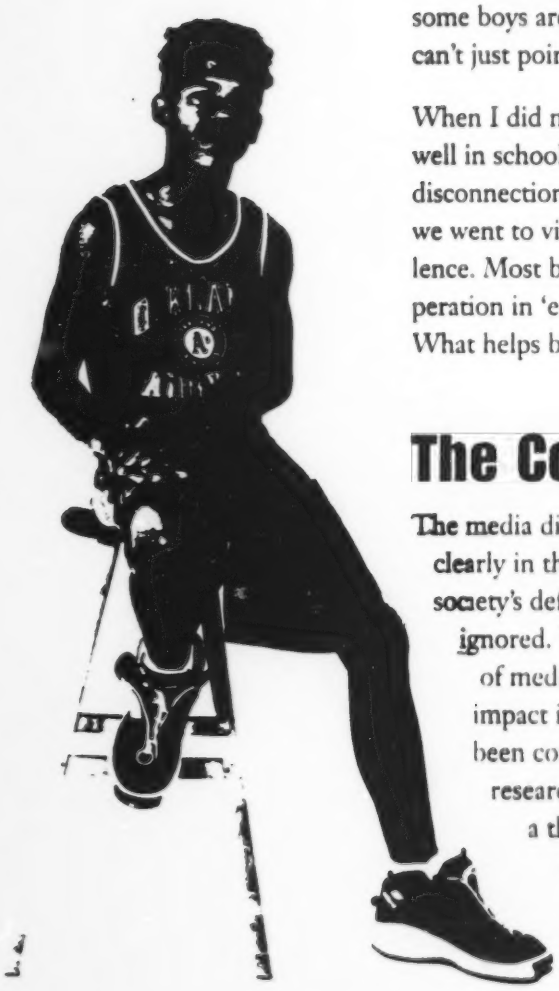
William Pollack, Ph.D., and Craig Kurokawa

bravado, a mask of masculinity, the outside of which is 'I'm fine, Mom,' or 'I'll do it myself,' or, with adolescent boys, 'Leave me alone.' You may say this doesn't happen in your family, but society delivers this message, and the media—as a mirror of society—reinforces the message.

Then what emotions are boys allowed to express? If they can't be sad, if they can't cry, if they can't be vulnerable, what emotion is left? Anger, frustration, and irritable action. And that's what boys engage in. That's what adolescent boys who have problems express. And then we say, 'Oh my, how did they get that way?' When they repress normal feelings like love because of social pressure, boys lose contact with the genuine nature of who they are and what they feel. And, worst of all for society, we lose contact with them.

If we don't allow our boys to cry tears, not just at five or at six, but at ten and at fifteen and twenty, then some boys are going to cry out with their fists and some boys are going to cry bullets and then it's going to be too late and we can't just point the finger at them.

When I did my research for *Real Boys*, 'normal' boys—boys who are doing well in school—talked about a level of angst, pain, sadness, loneliness, and disconnection that was very similar to the kind of stories we were told when we went to visit Littleton and Springfield. But most boys don't engage in violence. Most boys don't engage in suicide. Most boys live lives of quiet desperation in 'emotional Siberia.' We don't need to send them further out. What helps boys is connection, empathy, and love."



The Conference

The media did not create the troubling status of boys today. But the media is clearly in the mix, delivering countless images and messages that reinforce society's definition of masculinity. So powerful an influence cannot be ignored. We know that from an early age, boys are especially active users of media and, although researchers have suggested that the cumulative impact is powerful, particularly during adolescence, few studies have been conducted on the topic. The groundbreaking Children Now research commissioned for this conference provided the basis for a thoughtful, and at times deeply personal, discussion among advocates, academics, and entertainment industry leaders.

Conference Overview

The Panels

Breaking the Boy Code: Boys, Relationships, and Emotions

Boy Meets World: Success, Values, and the Media

Must Boys Be Boys? Action, Adventure, and Aggression

What It Means to Me: Kids Speak Out

The Panelists

Dr. Neal Baer, Co-Executive Producer, *ER*
Dr. Gordon Berry, Professor, UCLA
David Britt, President/CEO, Children's Television Workshop
Rich Cronin, President & CEO, Fox Family Channel
Todd Cunningham, Senior VP, Research & Planning, MTV
Chuck D., Rap Artist/Author
Greg Daniels, Executive Producer, *King of the Hill*
Jeffrey Glaser, VP, Twentieth Century Fox TV
Jordan Levin, Executive VP, Entertainment, The WB
Jackie Lyons, VP, Drama, ABC Entertainment
Jackson Katz, Educational Filmmaker
Rick Mater, Senior VP, The WB
Roland Poindexter, VP, Programming & Development, Fox Kids Network Worldwide
Dr. William Pollack, Assistant Clinical Professor, Harvard Medical School
Lois Salisbury, President, Children Now
Ellen Sandler, Former Co-Executive Producer, *Everybody Loves Raymond*
Herb Scannell, President, Nickelodeon
Eric Schotz, Executive Producer, *Guinness World Records: Primetime*
Larry Smith, Anchor, CNN/*Sports Illustrated*
Michael Tollin, Co-President, Tollin/Robbins Productions
Jeff Valdez, Co-Chairman, Si TV
Sandy Wax, VP, Research/Planning, The Disney Channel

The Moderators

Geoff Cowan, Dean, Annenberg School for Communication, USC
Jessica Klein, Consultant, Lynch Entertainment
Dr. William Pollack, Assistant Clinical Professor, Harvard Medical School
Lois Salisbury, President, Children Now
Bill Whitaker, Correspondent, *CBS Evening News*

The Kids

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Herb Scannell, President, Nickelodeon

Chuck D., Rap Artist/Author

David Britt, President/CEO, Children's Television Workshop

Greg Daniels, Executive Producer, *King of the Hill*

Selected findings are included throughout this report.

Complete research results and methodology are available under separate cover.

The Research

Entertainment Media Content Study

This study looked at entertainment content in media that are most popular with 12 to 17 year old boys, including prime time broadcast television programs, films, and music videos.

"Concern about the impact of media has prompted numerous studies about the representation of women and the representation of minorities in entertainment content. But there's been virtually no previous research on the representation of men and boys, perhaps because being powerful and dominant has never before been defined as a straitjacket." ■ *Dr. Katharine Heintz-Knowles*

Katharine Heintz-Knowles, Ph.D., Children's Media Consultant

National Survey and Focus Groups

This research consisted of two focus groups of boys and a poll of 1,200 boys and girls, ages 10 to 17. The sample of children in the poll included the four major racial groups, each representing its actual proportion of the total population of children.

"This research is a very exploratory look at boys, and is the first comprehensive survey of its kind. The kids we polled say that men are often portrayed as either one extreme or the other and never a realistic combination of traits you see in real life. Even with such an exploratory topic, the kids have a clear perception of how men and boys are portrayed." ■ *Celinda Lake*

Celinda Lake, President, Lake Snell Perry & Associates

Children and Sports Media Study

This poll, conducted by the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles,[2] consisted of a telephone survey of 480 children, ages 8 to 17, to determine what sports are most widely watched, which types boys prefer, and whether they are different than those watched by girls. This research helped determine which sport shows to examine in Children Now's sports media content study.

"According to what boys tell us, television is the most used sports medium. Highlights shows and broadcasts of competitive events are the most watched types of programming. Pro-football, basketball, baseball, and wrestling are the most watched sports. Most viewing occurs at home and it occurs in the presence of other people, most frequently with fathers." ■ *Dr. Wayne Wilson*

Wayne Wilson, Ph.D., VP, Research, Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles

"If fathers are sitting there serving as mediators saying things like, 'Johnny, I don't know why Gordon Berry is playing in pain because that's not good for your body,' that's one thing. But if the father is there applauding certain kinds of skirmishes, certain kinds of behaviors, then we have a whole different set of issues." ■ Dr. Gordon Berry

[1] *Boys to Men: Entertainment Media Messages About Masculinity*, September 1999.
Boys to Men: Sports Media Messages About Masculinity, September 1999.

[2] *Children and Sports Media*, Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles, August 1999.

Sports Media Content Study

This qualitative study looked at the sports programs most popular with adolescent boys, including NBA playoff games, Major League Baseball, ABC's *Monday Night Football*, Professional Wrestling, Extreme Sports, ESPN's *SportsCenter*, and the commercials shown during these broadcasts.

"What we were concerned with is when boys watch these programs, what are they seeing? What values and ideas about gender, race, aggression, and violence are being promoted? There are certainly differences across different sports and commercials, but when we look at all the programming together, it is possible to identify several recurring themes. These themes can be outlined and summarized in what we call 'the televised sports manhood formula.'" ■ *Dr. Michael Messner*

Michael Messner, Ph.D.,
Associate Professor of Sociology, USC

Darnell Hunt, Ph.D.,
Associate Professor of Sociology, USC

Felix Sanchez and Vince Han

The Panel Perspective

Through focused discussions on emotions and relationships, success and values, action and adventure, each panel sought to define and understand the ways in which masculinity is embodied in the media. The themes that emerged are summarized here through five classic media icons: **The Joker, The Jock, The Strong Silent Type, The Big Shot,** and **The Action Hero.**

"The Joker"

Boys love to laugh. Their favorite television programs and movies are comedies, and the vast majority of their favorite characters are comics. To be funny, even to be described as acting **"dumb"** or **"goofy,"** is high praise for male characters. Women comics, on the other hand, are rarely identified as favorites by boys or girls. Humor is a highly admired characteristic for men and does not diminish a male character's appeal to boys, whose own **"mask of masculinity"** does not exclude laughter. An opportunity exists for more positive media messages to be integrated into the framework of comedy by capitalizing on its appeal to boys.

"When it comes down to it, [Homer Simpson] really loves his family, and while no one aspires to be Homer, I think that at least there is some love in the family there and it's a positive character. I think that is something that is missed sometimes."
■ *Rich Cronin, Fox Family Channel*

"I watch *Home Improvement* a lot, and if it's your first time seeing that show, you're going to think that Tim Allen is portrayed as a jock. I mean he likes sports; he likes football; he also likes his cars; he's always getting into accidents on his show. So you're going to think that that's basically the way the show goes. Yet if you keep watching it, you notice that occasionally, without the comedy they have a few family values and stuff, you know. Like they'll have like a deep argument with their son or something like that. And it makes people think more about the show than just as a comedy." ■ *Jared Brewer, age 16*

Research Findings

- **Across racial, gender, and age lines, 98% of children say that boys and men on television are funny.**
- **Boys are much more likely than girls to list "funny" as their top reason for choosing an individual to be one of their favorite TV personalities.**
- **Boys are more likely than girls to watch cartoons.**

"The Jock"

Ninety percent of our nation's boys regularly or often watch televised sports programs. With color commentary and accompanying commercial advertisements, these broadcasts project a clear message about masculinity. A real man must be strong, tough and, above all, **a winner**. He must be willing to compromise his own long-term health; he must fight other men when necessary; he must avoid being soft; and he must be aggressive on the **"battlefields"** of sports as well as in his consumption choices. His aggressiveness will win him the adoring attention of beautiful women and the admiration of other men. Nowhere are rigid messages about masculinity more firmly and dramatically reinforced than in sports programming. Yet the value and excitement of athletic excellence and powerful competition would not be diminished by commentary and commercials freed from these troubling stereotypes.

"I remember growing up when there was a fight on the football field, the camera went away from the fight. Now they go into the fight, cut to a close-up, slo-mo it, and offer the tape after the game in the highlights. And there was a football game on just last weekend with Tampa Bay and Denver. When Warren Sapp broke his wrist, you could release a video on the time they spent just talking about putting it in a cast, his coming back out and being the ultimate warrior." ■ *Jeff Valdez, Si TV*

"[In the] sports news reporting sector, you have to be very careful. The more channels you have, the more people you have to have. [If] you have producers or anchors who are not as talented or experienced, they may not present that video, that story, that image, in the same way that the professionals would have. That's not a knock on anyone who works in my industry, but that's just the way that it is." ■ *Larry Smith, Anchor/CNN Sports Illustrated*

"I think we've come a long way. Football players have excused themselves from games because they chose to be with their wife while they're delivering a baby. There are a lot more instances of athletes emoting publicly and not being ashamed of it. Recently Brett Favre, rough and tough quarterback for the Green Bay Packers, broke down after a game that he won, openly wept in the press conference and everybody applauded."
■ *Michael Tollin, Tollin/Robbins Productions*

Research Findings

- **Sports coverage emphasizes the notion that violence is to be expected.**
- **Athletes who "play with pain" or "give up their body for the team" are often portrayed as heroes.**
- **Commercials seen during sports programming typically play on the insecurities of the audience, convincing them that purchasing a particular product will help overcome fears, embarrassments, and shortcomings.**
- **Commentators consistently use martial metaphors and language of war and weaponry to describe sports action.**

"The Strong Silent Type"

From John Wayne to George Clooney, depictions of **"real men"** have traditionally focused on being in charge, acting decisively, containing emotion, and succeeding with women. For boys of all ages, these depictions reinforce and glorify a limited emotional range for males and portray the most admirable men as those who solve problems through action and keep their feelings under control. The **"strong, silent type"** does not appear vulnerable. He is rarely frightened. He doesn't engage in "women's work." He doesn't talk about his feelings, and he is unlikely to cry. These depictions mirror the messages boys receive throughout society, but they fail to reflect the full range of emotions which boys and girls should feel free to express.

Research Findings

- **Overwhelmingly, children say that they rarely see men or boys showing signs of vulnerability on television.**
- **A majority of children say that men and boys on television are often portrayed as focused on the opposite sex.**
- **Over one third of children say that they never see television males performing domestic chores such as cooking or cleaning.**

"For our new *Boyzchannel*, we started out asking boys what they think girls want. And the boys, from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, all said girls want a guy that is tough, that is cool, that's got it together, that looks good, has a good car, all these kinds of things. And then they brought the girls in, adolescent girls, and they were asked what kind of boys they were looking for. And they said, 'Well, one thing that drives us crazy about boys is that they're always trying to act so macho and so cool.' They said just about the opposite of what the boys had said, and it came out that the boys were getting their cues from television and movies." ■ *Rich Cronin, Fox Family Channel*

"I think there is an over-abundant reliance on research that shapes television. When you put twelve boys in a room with cameras and a two-way mirror and ask them to talk about television and ask them if they like the sensitive character, of course they're going to say no. Because if one says, 'You know, I sort of like that character,' he gets laughed out of the room. They close up. Until there is a cycle that's broken throughout society, it's very hard to take literally what boys are saying to us within our traditional focus groups." ■ *Jordan Levin, The WB*

"Well, you know, society has done a big number on the surgery of female relationships, but somehow boys have fallen through the cracks. So we do a great deal of work on *The Real World* to make sure we showcase young men in real life situations. Sometimes they cry. We clearly show them dealing with real life issues." ■ *Todd Cunningham, MTV*

"The shows that tend to delve into relationships typically have writers who are interested in those things. I think there's some cause for feeling a bit optimistic this year. There are a number of new shows that deal in positive ways with relationships of all kinds." ■ *Dr. Neal Baer, ER*

"The Big Shot"

The Big Shot wins. He is the epitome of success, embodying the characteristics and acquiring the possessions that society deems valuable. In the boardroom, the operating room or the courtroom, as an athlete, an actor, or a rock star, this is a man-among-men. He is primarily motivated by work rather than family responsibilities, but he is also confident and successful with women. He is not likely to be in middle management, at a work station, or at home. The status achieved by The Big Shot is rewarded with wealth, prestige, possessions, and an elevated status among his peers. He is "Numero Uno."

"I don't think a lot of TV characters say, 'Hey, I earn $250,000 a year,' or 'Look at the money in my pocket.' I think that views are taken from what they project and what their takeaway is from seeing someone in a nice car or seeing a house that has five bedrooms or whatever that may be. I think television has an aspirational quality to it and that there isn't a lot of thought given to production design and wardrobe and all of the qualities that sort of dress television up." ■ *Jordan Levin, The WB*

"I live in Seattle and our headline the other day in the morning paper was that we now own the most expensive baseball players in the history of baseball. So we have these giant salaries and that's what we talk about when we talk about athletes. And then on television we have blue collar families, but the blue collar men are not portrayed as enjoying their work and admirable." ■ *Dr. Katharine Heintz-Knowles, Children's Media Consultant*

"The research finding that kids (boys in particular) feel that they are very different people than the people that are portrayed in the media is, on the one hand, profoundly sad and disturbing. On the other hand, I think it's also a ray of hope. If we can begin to do some of these things a little bit differently, we are going to attract audiences." ■ *David Britt, Children's Television Workshop*

Research Findings

- **Thirty-eight percent of children polled think that "having money" indicates success on entertainment TV, but only 21% think that it is a realistic indicator of success.**
- **Children see men on television as leaders and problems solvers, funny, successful, confident, and athletic.**
- **Across boys' favorite media, men are more closely identified with the working world and high prestige positions, while women are identified more often with their domestic status.**

"The Action Hero"

The vast majority of boys love action. They prefer intense games and vigorous play, and it is no surprise that media depictions which include speed, energy, danger, and high levels of activity are their favorite forms of entertainment. The stereotypical action hero is strong, but not necessarily silent. He is often angry. Above all, he is aggressive in the extreme and, increasingly over the past several decades, he engages in violent behavior. For an audience of boys restricted by society from expressing or even feeling a full range of emotions, the enthusiasm for action heroes should come as no surprise. The challenge for the media is to satisfy the desire for excitement and action without inevitably escalating to violence.

"[At Nickelodeon] we put kids and the producers together, and kids were interested in things that were kind of scary, but not *Friday the 13th*. They just wanted a thrill and a chill and they didn't necessarily want to go deep into a world of violence. It's a choice that we make. You get to pick and choose what you make. Yes, writers have things that they want to do and things that they don't want to do, but if you have a point of view about what you want to make, then I think that will influence a lot of what's on television." ■ *Herb Scannell, Nickelodeon*

"We're not as cynical as people think in television, and we do take the images seriously....You have a show like *Dawson's Creek*, where the guys do nothing but talk about their feelings. You have, I think, a limited amount of male action heroes and characters on television now; it's a different kind of male." ■ *Rick Mater, The WB*

"[Violence] might not be on network TV anymore, but it has [been in the media] over the last ten to twelve years, especially in the movies. And now it's leaped over into music. It's even leaped over into sports where there's more talk and more bravado on the court and on the football field and on the baseball field than there is better play. This puts it into the black as opposed to the red. But at the end of some people's story, it's still in the red and it's coming in bloodshed." ■ *Chuck D., Rap Artist/Author*

"I think if you really show the consequences of violent acts … the pain and the blood and the gore that goes with it … I'm sure a lot of programs wouldn't want to do that. Hate and violence is a part of life, and to take it out of television or take it out of media would be impossible. The question is, are we just infusing it or glorifying it, or are we seeing it for what it really is in some sense?" ■ *Dr. William Pollack, Harvard Medical School*

"While images of men have gotten bigger and stronger, more muscular and violent, those boys who committed acts of outrageous violence were not big and strong and muscular. But what did they have? They had the guns and the explosives as an equalizer. They were bullied. But the one way that they could get back at those bullies was through fire power and weaponry."
■ *Jackson Katz, Educational Filmmaker*

Research Findings

- **Almost three fourths of young adult male characters on TV use anti-social behaviors to solve problems.**
- **Some violence appears in over half the sample of television shows and movies most popular with boys.**
- **Almost three fourths of children describe males on television as violent and more than two thirds describe them as angry.**
- **One in five male characters on TV employs some form of physical aggression to solve problems.**

Kids Speak Out

What It Means to Me

A panel of young people from the Los Angeles area offered opinions, observations, and advice for media makers.

"It sounds like there is a disconnect between what the kids are saying and what the writers and the creators are producing. Where do these images come from?"

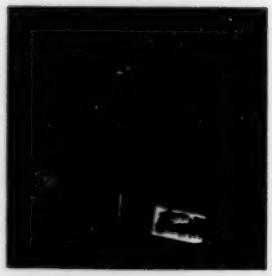
■ Bill Whitaker, CBS

"Images, of course, come from the creative people who bring to the table and bring to the characters the types of experiences that they understand. They bring their own world view to the scripts and to the characters; they bring their own socializing experiences."

■ Dr. Gordon Berry, UCLA

Craig Kurokawa, age 14

"Well, I have seen very few shows when I was little where the men were affectionate, where they were sensitive and things like that. But now, I guess you can see where they're trying to improve on the shows, where the men aren't always 'manly men' that stay home and watch football, [who are] beer guzzlers and have big bellies on their couches. I guess they do compromise a small bit, you know, but they could compromise a little bit more."
■ *Craig Kurokawa, age 14*



Amber Haywood, age 17

"I think you guys should take risks. I think it's all about taking risks because sometimes those risks can pay off. I think like on The WB, they have *Felicity*. They have *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. No one thought those shows would work. No one thought the show about a girl killing vampires was going to work. The movie didn't work. The show was a hit. A girl going away to college by herself, trying it by herself. That show's a hit. And *Dawson's Creek*. I think you guys need to try for something new. Some shows will work. Some won't, of course, but some will. It might work and you might have really good ratings. So I think you guys should all try that. Go for it."
■ *Amber Haywood, age 17*

"I'd like to find a movie where there is action and no, like, violence. I'd actually go see it just for the originality of the movie. Because you'd need to think it out. I mean all these movies with action and violence, they've been played out." ■ *Jacopo Campaiola, age 16*

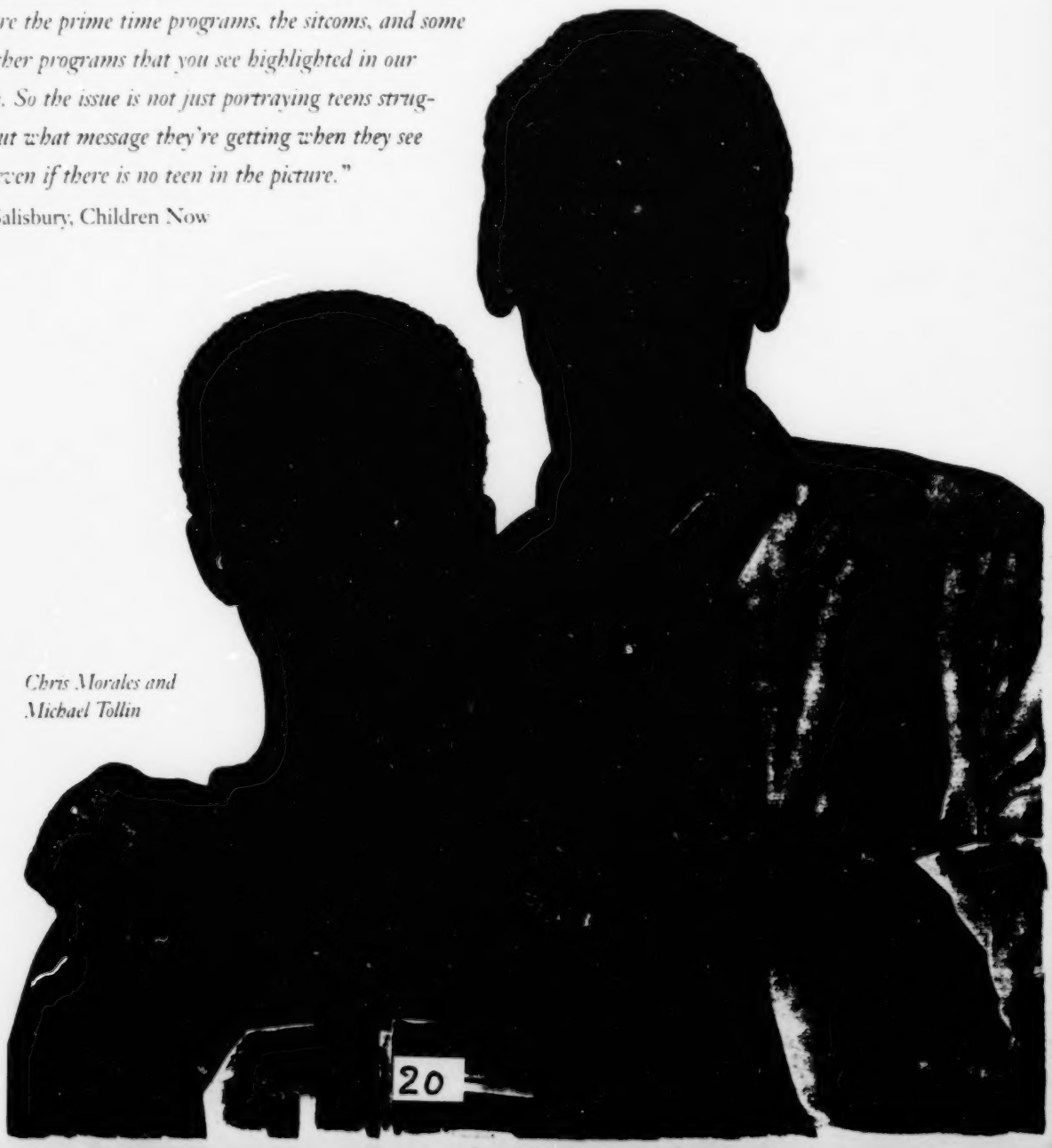
Nurit Yeshurun, age 15

"I think there are shows that portray violence and men being macho, like *NYPD Blue* and they show that the cops just sometimes break down, and you can see it. Which is, like they're getting started. I think that's a good idea to show that not everyone has to be tough, build a wall around yourself, because that's really unhealthy. And they're showing that I think it is okay to let out emotion."
■ *Nurit Yeshurun, age 15*

"Well, there was an episode of *The Smart Guy* that I saw. Most people think of that as just a show about the kid and then when the father comes into view they see him as just a regular male. But he's a widower and there was a time when the child was feeling kind of angry about missing her mom and stuff. And he stepped in and he played a sensitive part. I think that was good." ■ *Jared Brewer, age 16*

"While a lot of children's television portrays young people dealing with important personal issues, most of what kids watch are the prime time programs, the sitcoms, and some of the other programs that you see highlighted in our research. So the issue is not just portraying teens struggling, but what message they're getting when they see adults, even if there is no teen in the picture."

■ Lois Salisbury, Children Now



Chris Morales and Michael Tollin

Reflecting on the Issue

"One show that appears to me as an example of the way to do a show, an adventure show or an action show without showing violence, is in the kids' arena. Pokémon *is currently the number one kids' show. It airs on our network, on Kids' WB. It's a really interesting example of an action show that doesn't portray interpersonal violence and it's a huge hit."*

■ Rick Mater, The WB

"Something we can do is make sure that we take the time to back away from a project we're working on and make sure we're making good decisions. Those of us in the sports media would be very perceptive and very open to engaging in an open discussion about that."

■ Larry Smith, CNN/*Sports Illustrated*

"I haven't thought a whole lot about it in a self-reflective kind of way, because this is one of these subjects where actually I ***am*** the subject. I've thought about being a kid. I'm involved in kids' lives a lot, but I really haven't thought about being a boy. And it also made me actually think as a programmer. In the world of kids, we've done a lot to really champion girls and bring girls into the forefront of media, but there are probably places we haven't gone with boys. We haven't really taken opportunities to look at a boy from a point of view of the myth of being a mama's boy, which is something that happens with kids, and the idea of boys crying. Those kinds of things are very raw material that you can actually get a lot of good stories out of."

■ *Herb Scannell, Nickelodeon*

"Well, I actually think that today is the beginning of a process, an examination of these issues that will give people in the media and specifically us, clues as to how to deal with some of these problems and how to present characters in different ways and go back, in our case to our show runners and our writers about how to go against the grain in terms of what's been established and is usually stereotypical." ■ *Jordan Levin, The WB*

"Is there a way to portray action without violence? Writers and producers—as you are writing, as you are thinking of stories, as you are producing shows, think about another way. Because I can't think of anybody even posing these kinds of questions on any day-to-day basis."

■ *Jeffrey Glaser, Twentieth Century Fox TV*

"Those in the industry who already have started, who have action-oriented programs—not thoughtless action, but action-oriented programs, adventure-oriented programs, classic kind of programs without violence—aren't just doing a good social deed or aren't just responding to boys; they are going to get the green bottom line. I think those who come out front are going to be the ones who win, because in my own conversations with boys, when they are not in front of a million people, they talk about that kind of action without the aggression, they talk about their being afraid to say that they're afraid. They say, yes, they watch the aggression on TV, yes, they feel it, but they wish they didn't have to do it so much, but they can't tell anybody about that. And the person who captures that, the person who has that character in their series who isn't like that, or that series that isn't like that, is going to capture not just the minds and hearts of boys, but a gigantic market with an important bottom line. We have to get that message out."

■ *Dr. William Pollack, Harvard Medical School*

"I think I have some responsibility as a parent and as a producer and it's a matter of producers taking action and saying this is the show that I want to produce, this is how we want to do it. We can make a show interesting and watchful." ■ *Eric Schotz, Guiness World Records: Primetime*

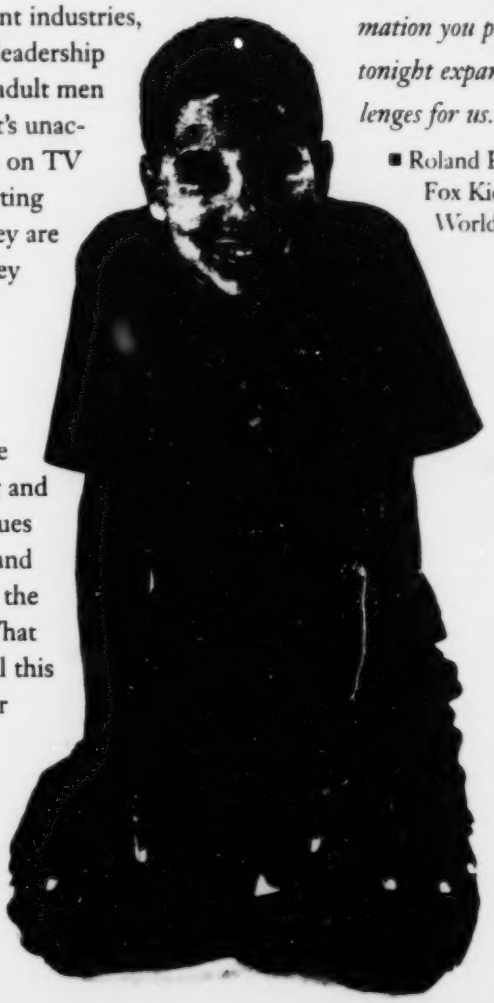
"There's a little bit more than just the bottom line of green. Because if it to these people making the decisions on the green, if it happened to their family, then all of a sudden it doesn't become a business decision, it becomes ethics, morality, and personal. So I just think that needs to go across the board and we have to understand that the people who make those bottom line green decisions also should have a caring about and a balance of what goes down over what they project." ■ *Chuck D., Rap Artist/Author*

"There are many men in the room who have enormous power in this society, and I feel like there is so much more that we could do as men proactively to work against both men's violence against men and against women. In the TV industry, in the entertainment industries, everywhere, there has been a shortage of male leadership on these issues. Young boys need to hear from adult men that abusing girls in any way is inappropriate. It's unacceptable and it's not manly. We need characters on TV shows, boy characters who are explicitly supporting girls and are also masculine. In other words, they are not made fun of because they support girls. They are even heroic because they support girls. We need to show that as well in the media."
■ *Jackson Katz, Educational Filmmaker*

"I think the challenge that we are all facing here is a complex one. We can think about how long and how far we still have to go when it comes to issues of diversity in television in terms of the health and well-being of our children. We can think about the broadening of roles for women and for girls. What would be so rewarding is for us not to wait until this issue around boys has percolated for a decade or two before we've really grappled with it."
■ *Lois Salisbury, Children Now*

"Our biggest hits have always been action adventure shows like Batman *and* Power Rangers *and* X Men. *All of these shows focus on what it means to be a hero, the action adventure mythology. What I'm trying to do in my shows is broaden the definition of who can be a hero and what makes up a hero. Certainly the information you provided tonight expands the challenges for us."*

■ Roland Poindexter, Fox Kids Network Worldwide



Looking Forward

Media makers have an extraordinary opportunity to create words and pictures that shape a healthy future for kids. Begin by asking important questions.

Behaviors

- How do male characters behave? Are they depicted engaging in a broad range of behaviors? Occupations?
- Do male characters avoid stereotypical masculine behaviors?
- How is male behavior rewarded? Which rewards are depicted as most valuable? Money? Power? Possessions? The attention of beautiful women?
- Are men shown as admirable when concerned with home and family?
- Is comedy used to reinforce gender stereotypes?

Emotions

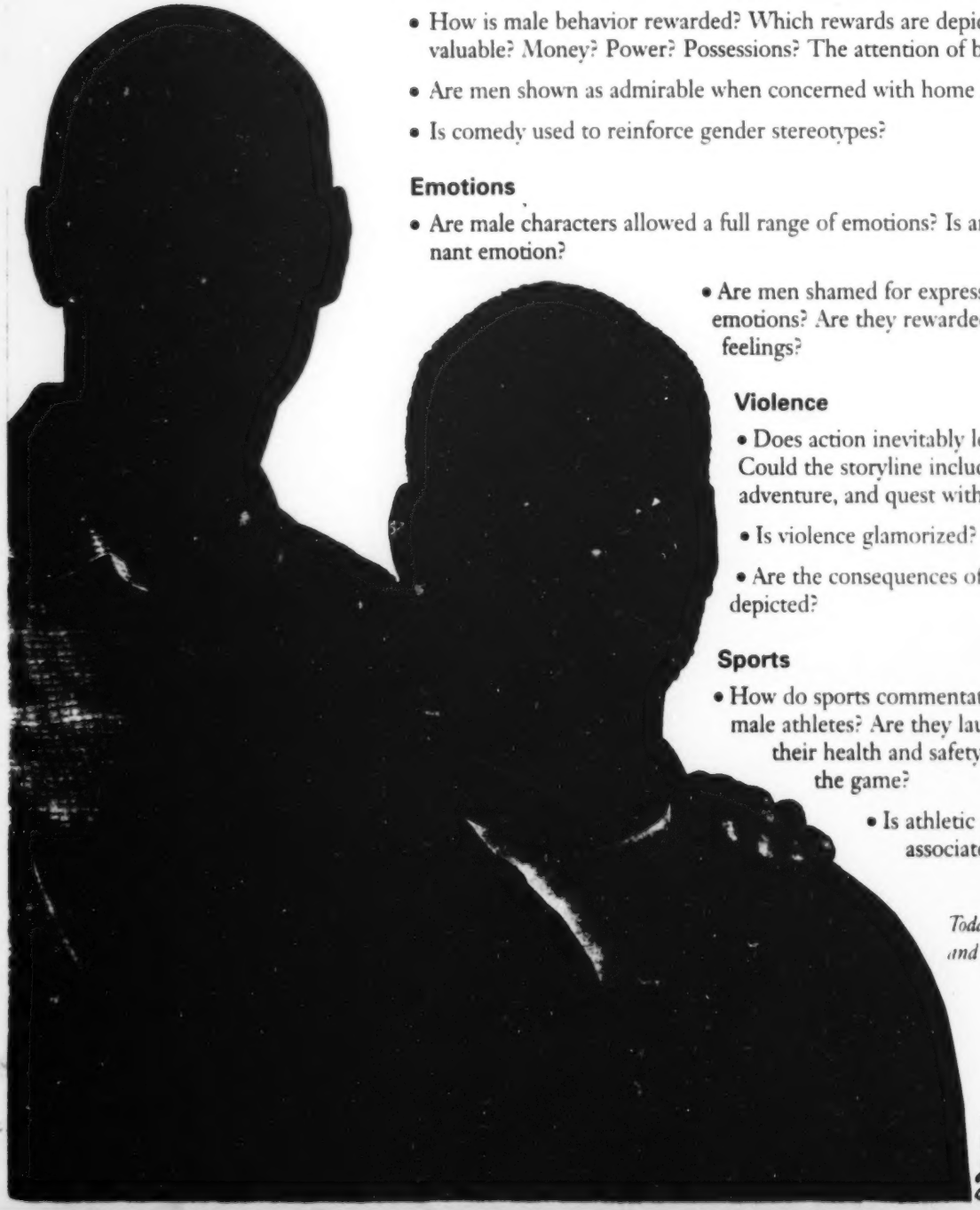
- Are male characters allowed a full range of emotions? Is anger the dominant emotion?
- Are men shamed for expressing other emotions? Are they rewarded for withholding feelings?

Violence

- Does action inevitably lead to violence? Could the storyline include action, adventure, and quest without violence?
- Is violence glamorized?
- Are the consequences of violence depicted?

Sports

- How do sports commentators describe male athletes? Are they lauded for risking their health and safety for the sake of the game?
- Is athletic competition associated with war?



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